



Statement for the Record

On behalf of the

**NATIONAL PARENT TEACHER  
ASSOCIATION (PTA)**

Before the

District of Columbia State Board of Education

July 7, 2010

**“The Common Core State Standards Initiative”**

By

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Good evening members of the State Board. On behalf of over five million members of the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), I welcome the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the adoption of the Common Core State Standards for the District of Columbia. The National PTA urges the State Board to consider the following recommendations to improve educational equity and family engagement in the District of Columbia:

- 1. Adopt the Common Core State Standards for the District of Columbia.**
- 2. Ensure that implementation of the Common Core State Standards includes robust professional development and authentic assessments.**
- 3. Engage parents in the implementation process in order to support student learning and to hold schools accountable.**

Both the PTA and I have a real connection to educational equity issues. As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, PTA's legacy of influencing public policy to protect the education, health, and overall well-being of children has made an indelible impact on the lives of millions of children and families. Since our founding in 1897, our parents have been on the front lines of education reform. PTA has advocated for the creation of kindergarten classes, school desegregation, and mandatory immunizations for school children.

I have had the opportunity to work as an educator and advocate committed to improving education for youth, particular those in underserved communities, for over a decade. I've served as a teacher in public and charter schools and in a juvenile correctional facility. I've also been a caregiver for an adolescent boy attending a public charter school in D.C. In each of these roles, I witnessed firsthand the difference in academic expectations and outcomes between students in underserved communities and their more affluent peers and seen how varying standards and educational quality based on nothing more than zip code widens the achievement gap. The adoption of Common Core State Standards is critical to ensure high, clear, consistent expectations that prepare all students for college and career and allow families to support and reinforce student learning at home and drive school improvement.

### **History of PTA on Common Core State Standards Initiative**

As early as 1981, the National PTA Board of Directors and its members adopted position statements in support of the development of "challenging and precise" standards on what knowledge and skills students need to learn.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, National PTA has worked closely with the Council of Chief State School Officers and

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<sup>1</sup> *National PTA Position Statements that Support the Common Core of State Standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.pta.org/3944.htm>

National Governors Association on the state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative in order to include the parent voice in the standards development process. Since the draft college and career-ready standards were released last summer, National PTA has provided feedback during each step of the standards development process.

Last year, PTA launched an initiative to mobilize its members in key states around the adoption and implementation of Common Core State Standards. This initiative focuses on educating and training its grassroots and grassroots leaders to support the Common Core State Standards in their states. We are currently working in Florida, Georgia, New Jersey and North Carolina, and plan to launch additional states later this summer.

The work of our parent leaders will not stop after states adopt the Common Core State Standards. Rather, our parents will play a key role in assisting with and monitoring implementation to ensure that all children are held to clear, high, consistent standards regardless of zip code.

**Recommendation 1: Adopt Core Common State Standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, have the opportunity to graduate high school prepared for college and work.**

Improving our nation's education system is a matter of national and economic security. Out of 30 industrialized countries, the U.S. ranked 25th in math and 21st in science in 2006.<sup>2</sup> In 2004, the United States ranked 14<sup>th</sup> out of industrialized countries in the proportion of young adults with a college degree. More troublingly, persistent achievement gaps exist across our nation and in the District of Columbia. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), African American fourth graders scored 26 points lower than their white counterparts on the 2009 NAEP Mathematics Assessment.<sup>3</sup> In D.C., the gap between African American and white fourth grade math test scores was 57 points. While PTA commends D.C. Public Schools for making remarkable strides in closing the achievement gaps on last year's DC-CAS, the district still has a long way to go. Many teachers in the District agree that Common Core State Standards will allow them to better prepare students for college and career. Sunaria Tatum, a 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts teacher at John Philip Sousa Jr. High School in Ward 8 said of the standards, "If I have a standard that I can go by that is clear and concise...then I can help my students soar."<sup>4</sup> The Common Core State Standards are a critical first step in ensuring that all students, regardless of their zip-code, have equal access to an education that prepares them for college and work.

Having access to a curriculum that prepares them for work will also aid students' economic success in the workplace. The employment rate for young African-American males who do not graduate from high school is 36.2%, compared to 65.2% for those with a high school degree.<sup>5</sup> Common Core State Standards will guarantee that students

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<sup>2</sup> National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers and Achieve Inc., *Benchmarking for Success* (Washington, D.C., 2008), Retrieved from <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0812BENCHMARKING.PDF>, 4.

<sup>3</sup> NAEP State Comparisons, 2009. Retrieved from:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/withinyear.aspx?usrSelections=0%2cMAT%2c1%2c0%2cwithin%2c0%2c0>

<sup>4</sup> Common Core State Standards, Assuring College and Career Readiness for All Students" National PTA, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Edelman, et al. Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., Table 2.5. Employment Rates and Wages for Young Men Ages 16-24 not Enrolled in School, 1999, p.17

who graduate high school are prepared for the workplace, and increase employment rates for students in the District.

Adopting the Common Core State Standards will also yield cost savings for parents, students, and taxpayers. A recent study by the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the nation loses more than \$3.7 billion a year because high school students are not learning basic skills they need to be successful in college and the workforce.<sup>6</sup> This includes \$283 million in tuition costs, and \$2.3 billion in lost wages.<sup>7</sup> During this recession, our parents, students, and communities are already struggling to make ends meet. They should not have to shoulder the additional costs created by standards and curriculum not aligned to college and work expectations. Adopting the common Core State Standards will help states cut education costs too. Collectively, states currently spend \$1.3 billion annually to develop, publish, administer, score, and report on tests.<sup>8</sup> States that adopt the Common Core State Standards save money by creating economies of scale for related materials, such as assessments and textbooks.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards would be particularly beneficial to D.C.. Too often, families leave the District when their children are in middle and high school to move to the suburbs where schools have a reputation for having higher standards and achieving better outcomes with students. Having the same high expectations for our students as our neighboring states would reduce the number of families leaving D.C. in search of improved educational opportunities. Moreover, Common Core State Standards ensure that students and families new to D.C. transition more smoothly to our schools' curriculum and assessments.

### **Recommendation 2. Ensure that implementation of the Common Core State Standards includes robust professional development and authentic assessments.**

When I was a teacher, it was difficult for me to translate several hundred pages of unclear standards into engaging instruction that met the needs of my students. Essential ingredients to the success of the Common Core State Standards Initiative include strong professional development and authentic assessments that move beyond multiple choice tests to measuring higher-order thinking and skills. For example, Cesar Chavez Public High School in D.C. has students prepare a senior thesis on a topic of interest and present their findings to professionals, parents, and their teachers. Our parents want their students to learn more than how to fill in a bubble on a test, they want their children to learn and develop relevant skills that will prepare them to be successful in life.

### **Recommendation 3: Engage parents in the implementation process in order to support student learning and drive school reform.**

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<sup>6</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, *Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation* (Washington D.C., 2006)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2010

Over 40 years of research has shown that parents are critical to helping schools close the achievement gap.<sup>9</sup> In fact, parent engagement is a cost-effective way to raise student achievement; studies show that engaging parents improves student achievement so substantially that schools would have to spend over \$1000 per pupil to get the same results.<sup>10</sup> A recent study by Anthony Bryk and his colleagues at the Consortium of Chicago School Research of the University of Chicago found that family engagement was one of the five “key ingredients” of urban school reform, just as important as teacher professional development, school leadership, and curriculum.<sup>11</sup> When parents are meaningfully engaged in the education of their children, they can help drive education reform and ensure that the Common Core State Standards achieve the stated goal of improving education for kids.

To support learning at home and drive school reform, our parents need to understand what is going on in classroom and be engaged in the academic decision-making process. This includes making information about the new standards as well as changes to assessment and curriculum available to parents in a format that they can understand. It also includes engaging parents to in decision-making about the implementation of standards, including professional development and curriculum. Parents know their children best, and have a valuable and critical perspective to offer when it comes to implementing a sweeping education reform like the Common Core State Standards. I urge you not only to adopt the Common Core State Standards, but also to engage families meaningfully in this process to raise student achievement.

### **Best Practices in Engaging Parents in Standards-Driven Reform**

Engaging parents in analyzing standards and student learning data is a best practice that has been implemented as a part of aggressive reform efforts in other large cities across our nation.

#### *New Visions-New York City*

For example, New Visions for New Schools, a nonprofit organization that works with high schools in New York City to raise student achievement, provides tools and training for parents on understanding standards and assessment data and monitoring students’ progress toward high school graduation. Parents, teachers, and students at over 30 New Visions high schools across the city meet regularly to review student progress and use data to plan interventions and next steps for students to meet achievement and graduation goals.

#### *Math and Parent Partners—University of Arizona*

Founded in 1999 with a grant from the National Science Foundation, the Math and Parent Partners (MAPPS), a K–12 family involvement program, seeks to improve

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<sup>9</sup> Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Houtenville, A. and Conway, K. (2008). Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement. *Journal of Human Resources*, XLIII, 2. pp. 437-53.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony S. Bryk and others, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2010), p. 84.

children's mathematical performance by creating opportunities for parents and children to learn about math together. Unlike other types of parent workshops which simply transmit information, MAPPS facilitates inquiry and gives voice to parents' ideas and concerns about their own and their children's mathematical experiences. Through math awareness workshops, parents work with their children in cooperative, hands-on problem-solving around a specific math problem and standard. The workshops establish an academic dialogue between parents and children that helps reinforce student learning of academic standards at home. MAPPS also help parents make connections between math standards and activities, real world applications, and access to careers. A distinctive aspect of the program is that parent and teacher leaders often work as a team to facilitate the workshops. Parents and teachers interested in becoming workshop facilitators attend leadership trainings where they learn strategies and guidelines for leading, recruiting and managing workshop activities. Though originally based in the southwest, MAPPS programs are now in place in 12 districts in nine states around the country. In a single year at a typical site, over 2,300 parent hours were logged in different MAPPS activities.

The evidence is clear—when schools, parents, and teachers partner to prepare students for college and career—student achievement increases. Adopting the Common Core State Standards will provide all students and parents with clear, consistent, and high expectations of how to be successful in college and in work. Our parents stand ready to support schools and teachers throughout the adoption and implementation process to ensure that all of D.C.'s students—regardless of what Ward they live in—have access to an excellent education.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.